

Sense of Belonging and the First-Year Experience

Jim Cole
BCSSE Project Manager &
NSSE Analyst

Jillian Kinzie
Associate Director &
NSSE Institute



40th ANNUAL CONFERENCE ON THE
FIRST-YEAR EXPERIENCE
HELD VIRTUALLY | FEBRUARY 15-19, 2021

First-Year Experience Conference 2021

Agenda

- Introduction to Sense of Belonging (SB)
 - Results from NSSE SB items
- BCSSE and NSSE and SB
- Uses of BCSSE and NSSE data to improve the first-year experience
- Wrap up and questions



Who's Here and What's Your Interest in this Session?

- Introduce yourself and your institution in chat
 - What's your interest in this session?

Do you have NSSE or BCSSE data?



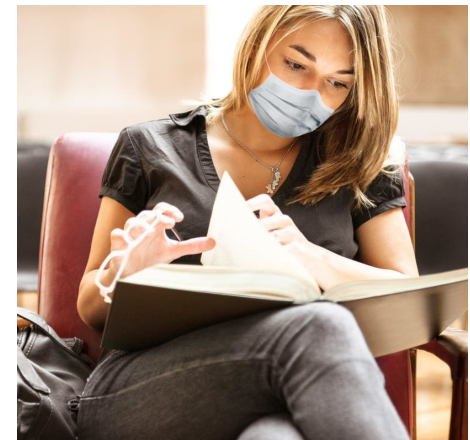
Search for participating institutions:

<https://nsse.indiana.edu/support-resources/participating-institutions/index.html>

Sense of Belonging

The psychological feeling of belonging or connectedness to a social, spatial, cultural, professional, or other type of group or a community (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Whether or not students feel respected, valued, accepted, cared for, included, and that they matter, in the classroom, at college, or in their chosen career path (Strayhorn, 2012)



Why Sense of Belonging?

- **Sense of belonging influences student persistence**
- **Interventions can improve students' sense of belonging**
- **Salient to design of first-year experience**





Why Sense of Belonging?

The Pandemic and Racial Turmoil Are Changing Curricula. Here's How.

By Alexander C. Kafka | OCTOBER 19, 2020

The Chronicle: Colleges are offering new classes on racial history and social justice...creating equity-and-justice centers, and hiring ethnic-minority specialists in neglected topics to deepen students' understanding. Also, in concert with co-curricular and extracurricular study groups & clubs, offering students in underrepresented minority groups a deeper **sense of belonging**.

NSSE's Sense of Belonging Items



Debut on NSSE 2020!

**Also appearing on NSSE
2021; and previously
featured on the
Inclusiveness and
Engagement with Cultural
Diversity module**

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Response options: Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree

a. I feel comfortable being myself at this institution.

b. I feel valued by this institution.

c. I feel like part of the community at this institution.

November 2020 - Annual Results

Building a Sense of Community for All



Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart University

Building a Sense of Community for All

We examined the relationships between students' sense of belonging (three new items on the 2020 survey) with engagement, perceived gains, and persistence, and also looked at patterns related to selected student characteristics.

[Read the story](#)

**121,955 FY, 149,466 Seniors
from 521 institutions**



Sense of Belonging Overall

90%

OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL
COMFORTABLE BEING
THEMSELVES AT THEIR
INSTITUTION

80%

OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL
VALUED BY THEIR INSTITUTION

80%

OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS FEEL
LIKE PART OF THE COMMUNITY
AT THEIR INSTITUTION

Most students feel they belong, but differences exist by intent to return and among student subgroups

Sense of Belonging & Persistence

- Belonging is particularly important for first-year retention
- Students' major also plays an important role in belonging
 - First-year students with a declared major felt greater belonging than those who were undecided

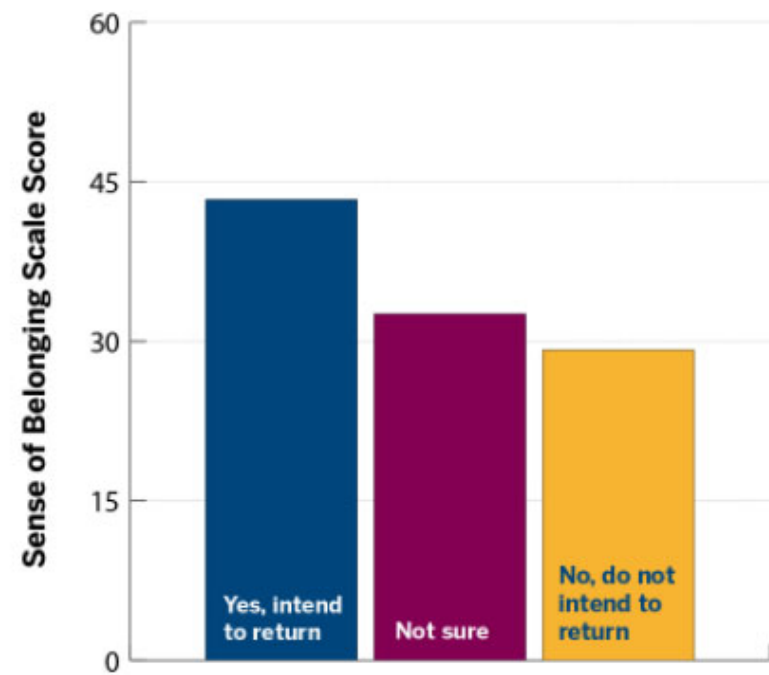


Figure 1. First-Year Students' Sense of Belonging by Intent to Return to the Institution



Relationship Between Sense of Belonging & Persistence

80% FY feel valued...but differ on intention to return

97%

OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS WHO FELT VALUED BY
THEIR INSTITUTION INTENDED TO RETURN THE
FOLLOWING YEAR

89%

WHO DID NOT FEEL VALUED INTENDED TO RETURN

Black or African American Students and Levels of Sense of Belonging

- Black or African American first-year students sense of belonging scores divided into Low, Middle & High SB groups.
- By examining what relates to groups, we can identify ways to improve experiences.

Table 1. Proportions of First-Year Black or African American Students within Sense of Belonging (SB) Groups by Aspects of Engagement

| Aspect of engagement | Lowest SB | Middle SB | Highest SB |
|---|-----------|-----------|------------|
| Frequently (very often or often) included diverse perspectives (political, religious, racial/ethnic, gender, etc.) in course discussions or assignments | 51% | 54% | 63% |
| Excellent (six or seven on a seven-point scale) interactions with faculty | 30% | 45% | 66% |
| Substantial (very much or quite a bit) institutional emphasis on encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds (social, racial/ethnic, religious, etc.) | 38% | 61% | 75% |
| Substantial (very much or quite a bit) institutional emphasis on attending events that address important social, economic, or political issues | 32% | 54% | 65% |

Note: Values in the table represent the proportion of all Black or African American students in the group who responded favorably (frequent, excellent, or substantial) to the item.



Student Populations and Sense of Belonging

What student characteristics do you want to examine for sense of belonging results?

Gender identity, race/ethnicity, international, first-generation status....

<https://tableau.bi.iu.edu/t/prd/views/NSSESenseofBelonging/NSSESenseofBelonging?%3AisGuestRedirectFromVizportal=y&%3Aembed=y>

Do Your Own Investigation

Use our new Tableau dashboard to see how institutions like yours compare on sense of belonging. Leverage the “Download” feature to save and share your results!

Visit the dashboard

Implications of Sense of Belonging Results

Knowing what relates to high sense of belonging for under-represented student groups, or populations of interest to the campus, suggest ways institutions can foster belonging

Our results suggest a focus on:

- **Reflective activities in courses,**
- **Positive relationships with faculty, and**
- **Institutional support for diversity (encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds, and attending events that address important social, economic and political issues)**



Data Use Example: Pairing SB with Data on Productive Mindsets



Complementary Efforts to Study and Act on Belonging

GEORGIA SOUTHWESTERN STATE
UNIVERSITY

In Georgia's statewide effort to increase graduation rates, universities are designing interventions to develop productive academic mindsets such as learning from setbacks, having a sense of purpose, and finding a place in the institutional environment.

- **NSSE 2020 sense of belonging results provide GSW a complementary measure to examine alongside belonging data from the institutions' results on the University System of Georgia's Mindset Survey.**
- **Results help identify topics for institutional action, with a focus on how aspects of student life such as contact among students from different backgrounds, being involved socially, and attending campus events, could be redesigned to focus more intentionally on their contribution to productive academic mindsets.**

Data Use Example: To Assess FYE Program & Retention Analysis



Affirming the Importance of Belonging

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY,
DOMINGUEZ HILLS

California State University, Dominguez Hills (CSUDH) is using its NSSE 2020 sense of belonging results in a variety of ways, including as part of their integrated assessment of their First Year Experience, in their routine sharing of results, and in an analysis of retention.

- SB results included as part of integrated assessment of First Year Experience
- Results shared with Associate Vice Presidents and Vice Presidents, General Education curriculum committee, advising council; and in analysis of retention
- FY belonging averages looked good, affirmation that CSUDH is inclusive
- Results informed Faculty Development Center emphasis on faculty's role in helping students feel valued and part of the community

Read more in our Annual Results

Engagement Insights: Survey Findings on the Quality of Undergraduate Education

Between November 2020 and February 2021, we will present five data-informed treatments of important topics for higher education.



<https://nsse.indiana.edu/research/annual-results/index.html>

BCSSE and NSSE

Data from BCSSE and NSSE can deepen our understanding of students' sense of belonging

Institutions using BCSSE and NSSE can undertake these same analyses to better understand sense of belonging and the first-year experience on their campus



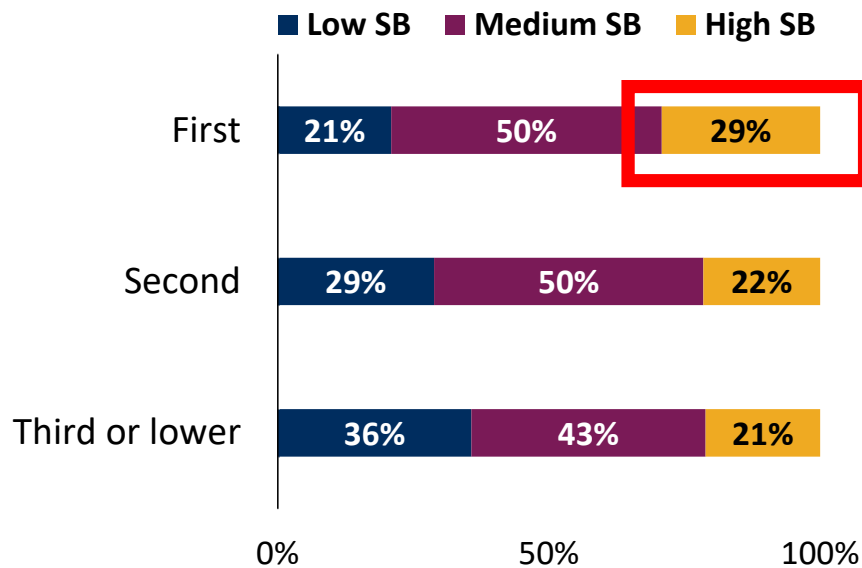
Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

Students enter with a variety of backgrounds, expectations, and beliefs about the coming year. BCSSE pairs with NSSE to allow a longitudinal view of student engagement.



Entering FY Characteristics and Sense of Belonging

Choice of institution

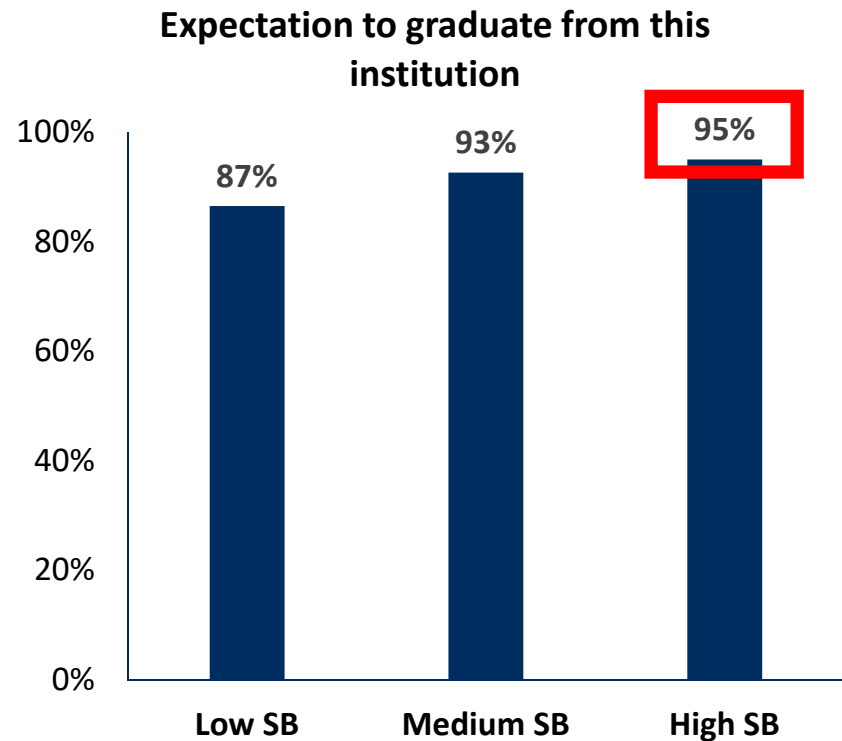


Students attending their first choice institution were moderately higher in SB the following spring

Entering FY Characteristics and Sense of Belonging

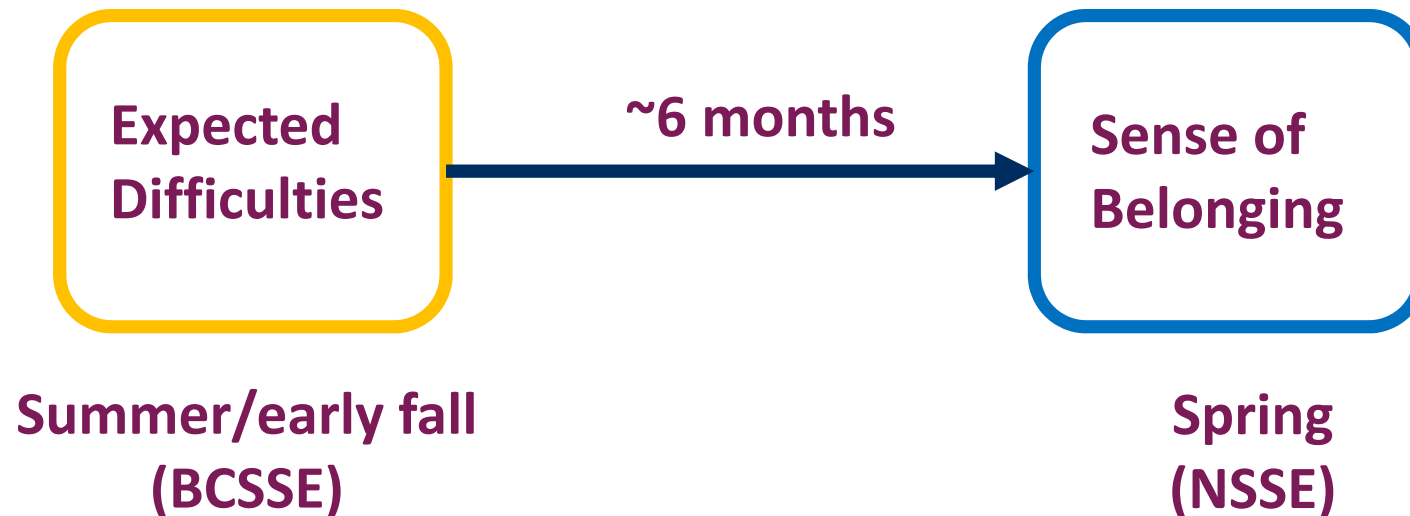
Most students enter college expecting to graduate from that institution.

However, those who experience higher SB more likely started with higher expectation to graduate from that institution.



Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

Students enter with excitement for the coming year, but also many expect difficulties during this time of transition



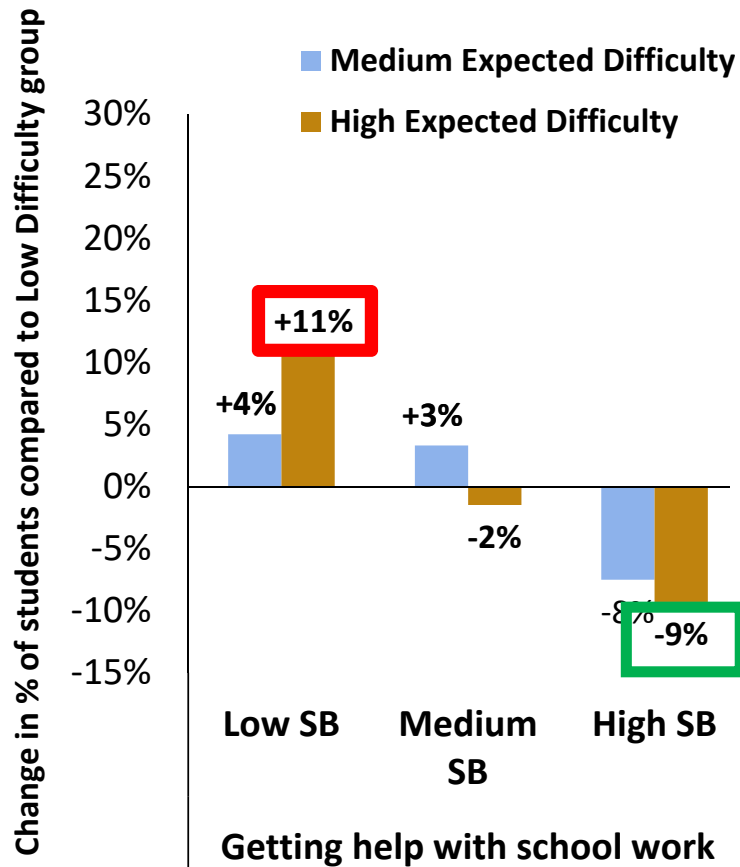


Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

What do you think? Are entering students who expect difficulty with the following during their first year: 1) Getting help with school work, 2) Making new friends, and 3) Interacting with faculty, more likely to have a low sense of belonging in the spring? Yes or No?

- ***Which do you think matter the most to low sense of belonging?***

Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging



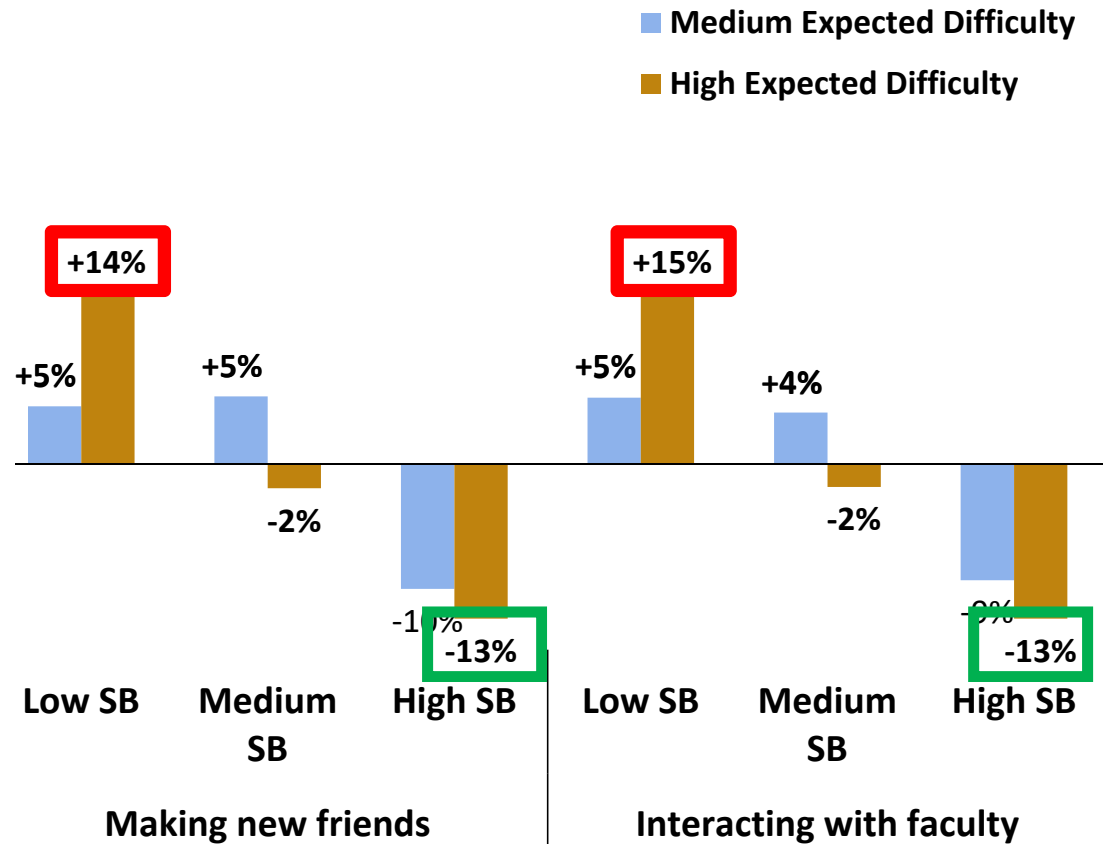
Within the low sense of belonging group, **11% more** students had high expected difficulty getting help with school work compared to students reporting low expected difficulty.

Conversely, within the high sense of belonging group, **9% fewer** students had high expected difficulty getting help with school work compared to students reporting low expected difficulty.

Expectations for Difficulty and Sense of Belonging

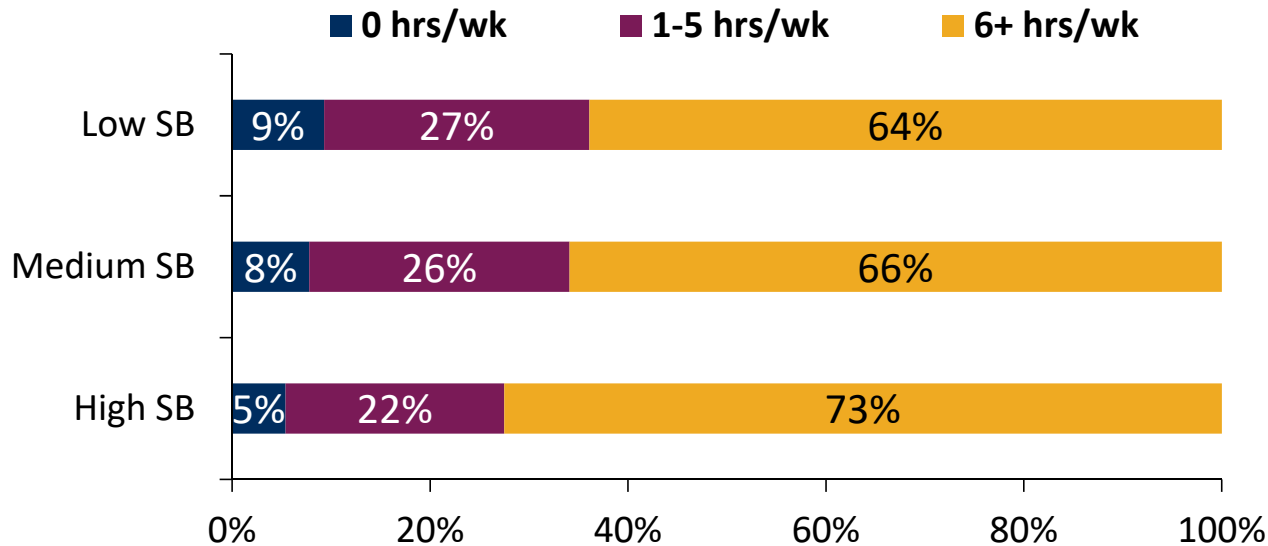
Change in % of students compared to Low Difficulty group

There is a similar pattern for expected difficulty making new friends and interacting with faculty



Co-curricular, Social Involvement and Sense of Belonging

During the coming school year, about how many hours do you expect to spend in a typical 7-day week participating in co-curricular activities?

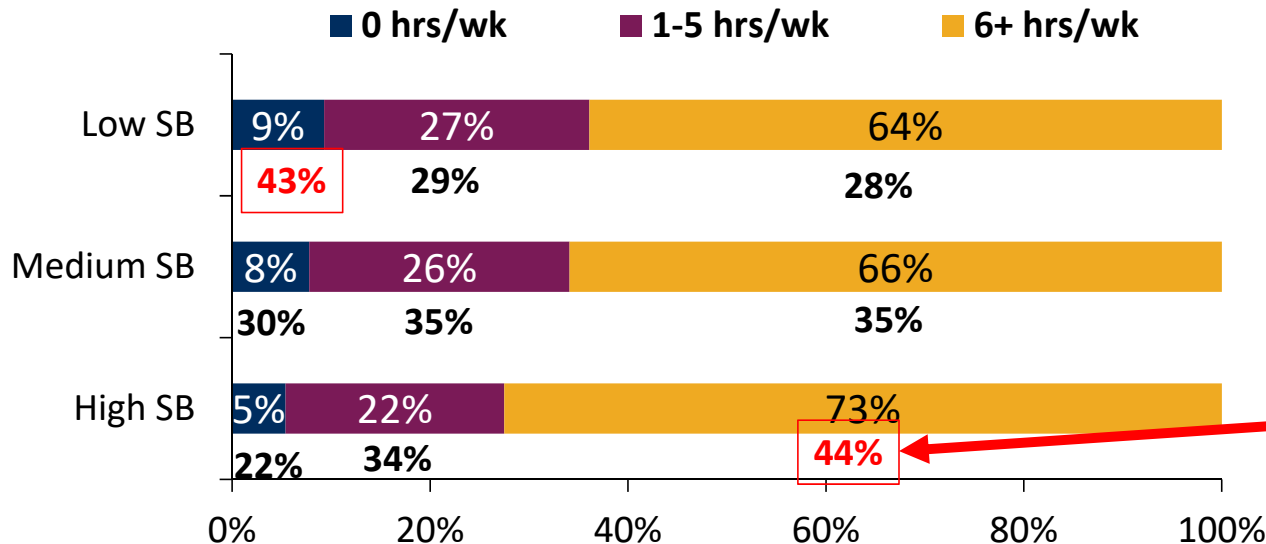


Participation in co-curricular activities is an excellent way to improve sense of belonging

Students who experience high SB tend to have higher expectation to participate in co-curricular activities.

Co-curricular, Social Involvement and Sense of Belonging

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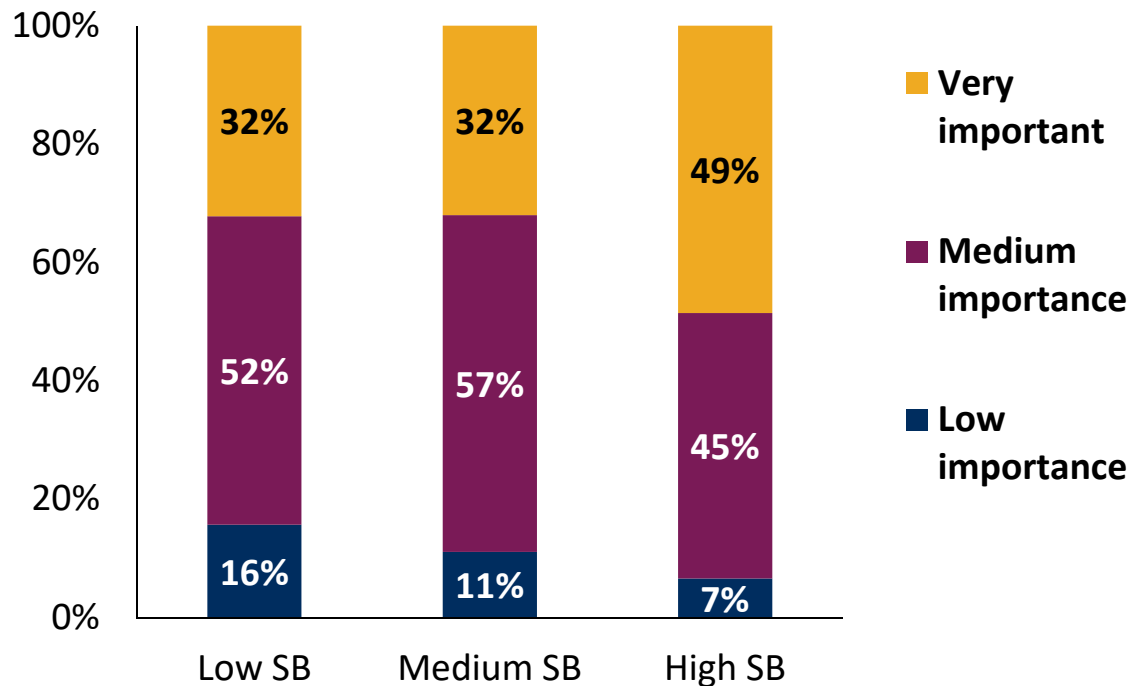
Participation in co-curricular activities is an excellent way to improve sense of belonging

Students who experience high SB tend to have higher expectation to participate in co-curricular activities.

Actual co-curricular, NSSE

Co-curricular, Social Involvement and Sense of Belonging

How important is it to you that your institution provides opportunities to be involved socially?



However, not all students place high importance on the institution to provide opportunities to be socially involved.

How can we facilitate the importance of social involvement?



Entering Mindset and Sense of Belonging

Entering mindset for those who experienced high sense of belonging:

- Expect less difficulty getting help with schoolwork, making friends, and interacting with faculty
- More likely to expect to be engaged in co-curricular activities and are more engaged
- More likely to place importance on social involvement



Applying NSSE & BCSSE SB Findings to Improve FYE

- Persistence influenced by feeling valued – can you focus on students with low SB? Explore student populations? Can you ask FY students what contributes to feeling valued? Are these things emphasized and intentionally developed in your FYE?
- Invite student reflection on belonging – increase reflection activities in courses, FYE programs
- Design for diverse experiences (encouraging contact among students from different backgrounds, and attending events that address important social, economic and political issues)
- Students who expect difficulty getting help, making friends and interacting with faculty deserve interventions to assist with academic mindset
- Encourage co-curricular involvement to improve sense of belonging



NSSE and BCSSE details and how to get involved

- BCSSE recruitment 2021 (March-Sept.)
- NSSE recruitment 2022 (May – Oct.)





BCSSE Basics

Purpose: To measure prior academic and co-curricular experiences, as well as expectations and beliefs about participating in educationally purposeful activities during the upcoming academic year, for all **entering students including first-year, transfer, and older students who have little or no college experience.**

BCSSE results are used in many ways including:

- Academic advising
- Retention efforts and predictive analytics
- First-year program design and evaluation
- Faculty and staff development
- And more. . . .

See Using Your BCSSE Data:

bcsse.indiana.edu/usingBCSSEData.cfm

and other examples of NSSE, FSSE, and BCSSE Data Use:

nsse.indiana.edu/html/using_nsse_db



BCSSE Survey

High School experiences include:

- HS grades, math courses, AP, dual credit, and IB
- Hours Writing, Reading, Studying
- Learning Strategies
- Quantitative Reasoning
- Reflective Learning

Other questions for all entering students include:

- Sources for paying for college
- First generation status
- Expectation to graduate
- Expected grades
- Friends also attending
- Choice of institution
- Race/ethnicity
- Other background information

Expectations for the coming year, including:

- Hours preparing for class, working, etc
- Student-Faculty Interactions*
- Discussion with Diverse Others*
- Collaborative Learning*
- Expected Academic Difficulty**
- Academic Perseverance**
- Academic Help-Seeking**
- Perceived Academic Preparation*
- Importance of Supportive Environment*

* Corresponds with NSSE Engagement Indicator

** Corresponds with NSSE First-Year Module



Questions specific to Transfer and Older Students

Questions for transfer students includes,

Regarding the college or university they are transferring from:

- Type institution (baccalaureate, community college, etc)
- How many credits expect to transfer
- Previous Grades
- Use of Learning Strategies
- Expected co-enrollment (attend another institution while attending yours)
- Why they left the other institution

Questions for transfer and older students includes,

Regarding your campus:

- Why they chose to attend your institution
- How many more years they expect it will take to complete bachelor's degree
- Stress factors they expect to encounter (financial, meeting basic needs, time management, choosing a career, etc)
- Hours per week they expect to spend providing care for dependents and commuting
- Veteran status

BCSSE Reports

Summer/Fall

- Institutional data file
- BCSSE Student Advising Reports
- BCSSE Institutional Reports (on-demand)

Fall

- Grand Frequencies and Means

Winter (optional)

- Institutional data file
- BCSSE Institutional Reports (on-demand)
- BCSSE Student Advising Reports

*Available within hours (web)
or shortly after surveys
are scanned (paper).*

**Also, institutions that do NSSE in the
same academic year, get a combined
BCSSE-NSSE report**



NSSE Basics

National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)

- ❖ Administered annually at hundreds of baccalaureate level institutions across the US and Canada.
- ❖ Since 2000, approximately 6.4 million first-year and senior students enrolled at more than 1,600 institutions have completed NSSE.





NSSE Modules Relevant to FYE

NSSE Topical Modules

1. Academic Advising (**Updated 2019**)
2. Civic Engagement
3. Development of Transferable Skills
4. Learning with Technology
5. Experiences with Writing
6. Experiences with Information Literacy
- 7. First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions**
8. Global Learning
9. Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity



Thanks so much for joining us!

Jim Cole & Jillian Kinzie
**National Survey of Student
Engagement (NSSE)**
**Indiana University Center for
Postsecondary Research**

nsse.indiana.edu

